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The Black Cat

April 1899

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Frank Lillie Pollock.

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W. Macpherson Wiltbank.

The Bicycle that Ran Itself.
F. W. Sage.

The Disposal of Miss Polly.
Johanna Duncan.

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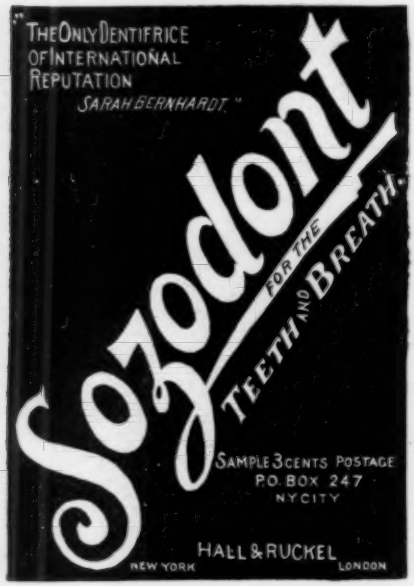

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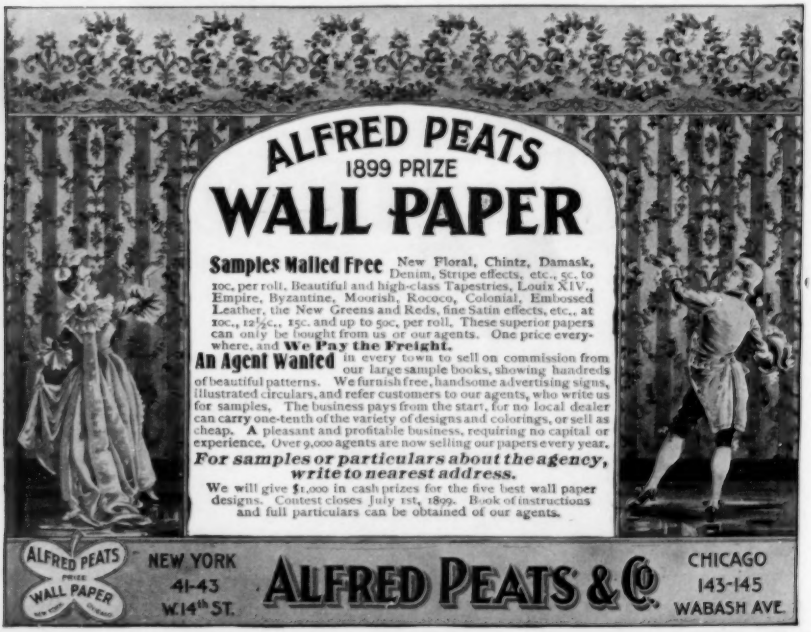
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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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No. 43. APRIL, 1899. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

THE BLACK CAT is devoted exclusively to original, unusual, fascinating stories — every number is complete in itself. It publishes no serials, translations, borrowings, or stealings. It pays nothing for the name or reputation of a writer, but the highest price on record for *Stories that are Stories*, and it pays not according to length, but according to strength. To receive attention, manuscripts must be sent unrolled, fully prepaid, and accompanied by addressed and stamped envelope for return. All MSS. are received and returned at their writers' risk.

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The Stolen Sky-Scraper.*

BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK.

FOR seven years and a half it remained the most stupendous of mysteries — that perplexing and incredible event which took place on the night of the 28th of June, 1891. Black magic seemed the only possible explanation, and, except those who are Theosophists, we do not believe in black magic any more. I know of two persons, at least, who became violently insane over that night's happenings, or rather, I suppose, their growing madness was precipitated by the event, and in my professional experience I encountered not less than a score of deaths which were indirectly due to the same cause. This is, of course, besides the lives that disappeared utterly with the great office building.

The building was known as the "Morrison," and it was the first of the modern iron sky-scrapers to be put up in the South. It stood sixteen stories, or two hundred and thirty-five feet high, and occupied a ground space of ninety-seven feet by eighty. It was constructed with a steel skeleton of especial rigidity, covered

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with the usual shell of brick and terra-cotta, while the first two floors were handsomely finished in stone. Next to it on one side was a paved area, used in connection with a tobacco warehouse; on the other side, and separated by a wide drive, was the Brown Bros.' building, looking flat and squat beside its towering neighbor. At the rear of the sky-scraper ran a twenty-foot alley.

The erection of the monster was not by any means an operation of pacific industry. Arthur J. Morrison, the president of the syndicate which was to put up the building, was well known as an uncompromising and bitter opponent of Labor Unionism in every form, and it was owing to his influence and assistance that the Cummings lock-out had been persisted in, the year before, to the strikers' discomfiture. His was a name hated in lodge-rooms, and as the consequence the men, while accepting his work, did so with an aggressive spirit of independence, keenly alive for any action that might be construed into bullying or injustice.

Mr. Morrison had not chosen to let out the work by contract but was seeing it through himself, and, whether or not he was aware of the feeling among his men, his conduct was certainly not conciliatory. It became known that he was getting his steel girders from the Boekh Iron Co., which was at that time warring with the Amalgamated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Workers, and a deputation of the men of this order employed upon the building went to remonstrate with him. Mr. Morrison not only refused to listen to what he termed their "dictation," but ordered his foreman to "give these men their time" at once, and to engage others. This was a declaration of war, and at once every ironworker, riveter, fitter and machinist took up his dinner pail and marched home, leaving the half-completed framework looking like an army of dissipated gibbets.

The president not only declined to reinstate the discharged men, but announced his intention of completing his building by the use of "scabs," and in view of the enormity of this conduct a sympathetic strike was ordered by the stone and brick masons and the other Unions concerned. Mr. Morrison thereupon instructed his foremen to engage none but non-Union labor, and as there was an insufficient supply of this at hand he imported it from Pennsylvania and New York. This action aroused the greatest indig-

nation among the strikers and caused a series of small riots which lasted till the completion of the building. On more than one occasion an armed mob attempted to intimidate the imported workmen from landing from the train ; one day a high scaffolding fell with three men, and it was rumored that the ropes had been cut by strikers. A little later the crowds assumed so threatening an attitude around the big building that the mayor read the Riot Act and called out half a battalion of military. Happily no lives were lost in the fracas that followed, and the disturbance was smothered though not exactly quieted, but day after day the petty war continued, in spite of mayor and police. Under such circumstances the work did not progress with great rapidity, and it was not until the eighth of April, 1891, that the last of the painters and decorators left the completed building.

To the Union men it seemed an additional insult that the building should be called by their enemy's name, but as the "Morrison Building" it was opened on April 24th, and the Bank of Kentucky immediately established its headquarters on the ground floor. Offices were quickly let upon the other floors, and though no Union elevator man, machinist or electrician could be induced to work in the building, yet men were found for these posts and the enterprise seemed to promise every success.

On the night of the 28th of June there were many complaints received at the central electric light station of defective circuiting and unlighted lamps. Policeman No. 37, passing along his beat in the business portion of the town about one o'clock, found that quarter in almost complete darkness. It was a moonless, cloudy night, and as the officer looked up the unlighted bulk of the Morrison Building could not even be discerned against the black sky. As he approached this edifice, wondering a little at the absence of light, he was suddenly felled by a crashing blow on the back of the head, and he knew no more till he revived in the hospital fifty hours later. A few minutes after, a sensible tremor of the earth was felt by almost every inhabitant of the city, asleep or awake, and this was instantly followed by a smothered, low-toned roar, indescribably vast in volume, but dulled as if by distance. The sound was so vague in quality that it was impossible to locate it, but it was so impressive that most persons ascribed it to an earthquake, and many

sat up all night in expectation of a second shock. They were certainly justified in their apprehension, for the seismometer at the Observatory registered a very considerable vibration.

The few watchmen and night hands who were almost alone in the down-town city were most affected by the shock, but the sound appeared so distant that, as no damage was done, none of them went far beyond their doors to investigate in the inky darkness. They supposed it to have been an earthquake, since there was absolutely no blast such as must have accompanied a heavy explosion.

But with the earliest dawn the amazing truth stood revealed. The stately building that had towered over the city towered no more. From a distance it might have been supposed that it had collapsed in the night, but it was not so. An early workman was the first to discover the fact that the Morrison Building was gone bodily, actually spirited away, with not so much as a brick left behind. Where it had stood the ground was as level and smooth as the ordinary neglected vacant city lot, strewn with sticks and stones and an occasional rusty tin can.

The man put both hands to his head, in horrid fear that his brain was going. The other buildings stood undisturbed around, the early sun shone clear, a distant clock struck five. Everything was natural and as it should be, except that terribly incomprehensible vacancy.

Two or three other men now appeared on the spot, and they likewise stood petrified with sheer amazement. It is a dreadful thing, and near akin to madness, when you chance upon something that the brain positively refuses to accept, in spite of the testimony of the senses. Some approached the spot and poked about cautiously in the air, vaguely fancying that in some mysterious way the building might have become invisible; but there was nothing but thin air.

The excitement of that day was a thing never to be forgotten in the city. All business was suspended, and vast crowds besieged the place, so that a double cordon of ropes and policemen was necessary to keep them back. The sand-bagged officer had been discovered before this, and no less than five other persons were found in an exactly similar condition, all insensible from blows

on the skull, and the whole six were found within two hundred yards of each other. On their recovery not one was able to throw any light on the mystery, and they told an exactly uniform story of having been struck down by an unseen force. Meanwhile the hard-packed clay where the sky-scraper had stood was carefully examined by the municipal authorities, and some excavations were undertaken, but there were no traces of even the foundations. The missing building seemed torn out by the roots.

The insurance companies refused to pay policies on the lost building, alleging very plausibly that there was no proof of its destruction, but at the same time the rates of insurance on real estate were raised throughout the city. It was a period of panic for property-holders, and indeed for every one. The terrible mystery of the affair was a thing to prey on the mind, and it was about this time that two women became violently insane, unquestionably owing to the prevailing high nervous tension. A great many persons left the city, and nervous prostration became almost epidemic. A fact afterwards remarked was that the consumption of liquors increased nearly two hundred per cent. in the week following the disappearance.

Meanwhile, the most energetic efforts were being made to solve the mystery. The city offered a reward of $5,000 for the correct explanation, and the Bank of Kentucky, which had lost nearly a quarter of a million in its vanished vaults, supplemented this by an offer of $10,000 more. Excavations were made to a depth of fifteen or twenty feet where the building had stood, without finding the slightest indication that the ground had ever been before disturbed. Detectives and scientists were equally at a loss. It was suspected that prominent Labor chieftains might know something of the secret, but nothing could be gained by this suspicion, for the mode of operation could not even be guessed at. The newspapers at last put forward a suggestion that the entire city had been hypnotized by some unknown agency and that the building was really there all the time, and this absurd theory was for some weeks discussed with the greatest seriousness.

At last, and very gradually, the excitement subsided, for the strain was in truth too great for the public to endure. A gubernatorial election in the Fall helped to distract attention, and the

mystery never quite recovered its grip. From time to time there have been tentative explanations put forth, but no satisfactory one, and this is almost wonderful, since, as I now know, there were not less than 350 men in the United States who were in the secret. But that secret remained a secret — up to this day.

. . . . . .

Last year I was employed as a volunteer surgeon at the notorious Camp Wykoff, and there I came in contact with a private of Volunteers (I do not care to mention the regiment) who was gradually dying of necrosis. He was plainly a man of education and of unusual force, of a rather unscrupulous character, I should judge, but his conversation was interesting, and we came to talk together a good deal. I was able to perform some small services for him, for which he conceived himself under a disproportionate debt of gratitude, and one day he said to me rather dryly, "I can't pay you, Doctor, for your kindness, and I can't leave you anything, but — "

"Don't talk nonsense, man!" I said, rather brusquely.

"But I can tell you what became of the Morrison Building if you would like to know. I used to see you around the place at that time."

He told me that evening in the great dim hospital tent, where the mingled odors of iodine and tobacco smoke made the hot summer air unbearable.

"I was a walking delegate then in a large Labor Union," he said, "and I was in the councils of the big chiefs enough to know that they were ready to do almost anything to get even with that man Morrison, and in fact we all felt that way. It wasn't the cash in the bank that tempted them, though they didn't let that waste when it came their way. I don't know who invented the scheme, but I believe somebody found out about the cave, and they worked it out from that.

"It seems that there is a long cavern running under the place so that about half the town stands on a shell of earth from thirty to fifty feet thick. This cave is geologically like the Luray caverns in Virginia and the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, and it can be entered at a point some miles outside the town. The first I heard of the scheme was when I was ordered from headquarters to

hire a hundred of the most reliable Union men I knew for secret work at a dollar an hour. Then a man came from New York to show us what we were to do. We bought an old warehouse a block away from the Morrison building, and beginning in the cellar we tunnelled toward the sky-scraper like a lot of bank-robbers. I was foreman and had a hundred men under me, but they worked in shifts an hour long, ten men to the shift. We used to cut shafts right down to the top of the cave to drop our dirt out of the way, and it used to make us nervous to see that black gulf down below. But it wasn't long before the Union had men working down there too, as we found later.

"In the course of ten days we got under the big building, and our engineers marked out its sides for us. In ten days more we had all the earth under the foundations completely honey-combed with tunnels, so that it seemed as if it must cave in upon us. But the engineers had calculated the strain to a ton, and knew just how far to go. Towards the last we didn't drop the earth through, but stored it up in big cross galleries cut away from under the foundations.

"The shell of earth was, I remember, just about thirty-seven feet thick, the cave below was two hundred and seventy feet deep and the building was two hundred and thirty-five feet high. Now while we were tunnelling, a gang of two hundred men was working below, by the light of great fires. They had heaped a great pile of packed earth forty or fifty feet high, and placed with mathematical exactitude perpendicularly under the position of the building. We could see the light of their fires far, far down in the darkness when we looked through our dump shafts.

"All was finished by the middle of June, but we waited a couple of weeks for a dark night, and it came on the 28th. We had placed a dozen light charges of rack-a-rock, attached to an electric wire, in the tunnels under the big building, and all our men were out of danger and ready for business. We had cut the electric light wires leading to that part of the city, and we had two dozen men with "life preservers" stationed all around the block, instructed to knock senseless any one who came near.

"At a little after one we touched it off. There was a very

slight explosion, then a dull, rending roar as the giant building broke through its foundation. It was too dark for us to see it; we could only hear the appalling rush of its descent. Yet it seemed to go down slowly, for the sides of the hole were barely large enough to permit its passage, though no doubt our nerves greatly exaggerated the time. Probably it was not more than fifteen seconds before an earthshaking jar announced that it had reached the bed prepared for it at the bottom. In its new position, a few feet of its top remained in the bottom of the hole, completely plugging it, while the large chimney reached nearly to the ground level.

"In an instant we were all at work. The big chimney was broken off and the loose earth we had stored was hoisted up with inconceivable rapidity, emptied into the cavity and packed hard. There were two hundred men at work by the light of dark lanterns close to the ground and with no more noise than a low-toned hum that could not have been heard a hundred yards. When the hole was filled up and packed down hard we scattered over it a cart-load of rubbish — and the thing was done. It had taken just one hour and thirty-five minutes after firing the shot.

"The strongly constructed steel frame of the building had prevented it from collapsing, but I heard that it was frightfully twisted and bent. There were three or four men in it at the time — killed, of course. Half the money found in the bank was divided among us, and the other half went into the fund for the support of strikes. I got $300 as my share.

"After the job was all done we got together and took a solemn oath of secrecy, and I believe that it has been faithfully kept, till now. All I ask is that you will say nothing till after I am dead. It has been a mystery long enough; it is time that the Morrison gang should learn what was the power that did this thing."

I did not have to wait long, for he died thirteen days later. He gave me no names, and I have revealed none.

The Mysterious Book.*

BY W. MACPHERSON WILTBANK.

SOME years ago there was published in London at the press of an eminent firm, a volume of autobiography, which as a revelation of scoundrelism stood unmatched in the history of literature.

The book, however, set forth so remarkably interesting a narrative and was composed in a style so clean and pure, that it actually sprang into a wide popularity, and for six months was undoubtedly the most talked of volume of the day.

Another feature in the book, which certainly as much as all else served to excite the interest of the reading public, was that it had been published anonymously, and within ten days of its appearance the whole community had given itself up, heart and soul, to the object of establishing the identity of the nameless author.

Guesses were hazarded in every direction. Physicians who in their time had wrought great good and had been deeply loved; clergymen whose lives had been esteemed stainless; judges of the highest standing — the memories of these and of many others equally renowned, were daily besmirched by the unreasoning accusations of inquisitive people. This continued until the nuisance was becoming unbearable, when the curiosity from which it arose, baffled in every attempt at solving the riddle, waned, and presently died from sheer hopelessness and despair.

At a time when the popular ferment about the book was at its highest pitch, Mr. Stephen Hardy, the one person who could have solved the mystery, sat quietly in his study, reading for the twentieth time, perhaps, the volume's preface, underscoring as he did so certain passages and words.

This preface, which is important, was in these words:

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PREFACE.

Every person's word is worth something. If you trust a man and he turns out a rascal, it was worth a little just to find him out. So of myself: These Memoirs prove me to have been a wicked man; yet they do not prove that I am a scoundrel now. Therefore I beg my readers to apply my maxim to my own case and to take my word for it when I say that an evil life leads only to bitterness, suffering and death. It is in the hope that I may save others from what I have myself been through, that I am now about to send these Memoirs to a publisher.

I am dying, alone and in want. The people about me speak a strange language. I long for a cooling drink; for a bite from one of the great yellow plums that grew in huge clusters against the brick wall in the garden of my old home; for a soft hand to soothe my brow and smooth my pillow; for the sight of a familiar face, above all of the face of one, who as a little girl was my playmate, and who later was my promised wife. Ah, those happy days, spent in the fields, spent in tramping through the sweet spring woods, spent in fishing on the lake! How ran the song we used to sing and laugh over:

"Of speckled eggs the birdie sings
And nests among the trees.
The sailor sings of ropes and things
In ships upon the seas.

"The children sing in far Japan:
The children sing in Spain.
The organ with the organ man
Is singing in the rain."

Bah! why do I recall such things —

Philosophers tell us that the souls of children famous for music, such as was Mozart, come from nightingales; that the souls of great architects come to them from beavers; whence, I wonder, have I derived my vicious, ungodly spirit? And with far more concern do I speculate, whither is that spirit bound? Ah, well! A few more hours and I shall know even this.

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Mr. Hardy, having reached the end, laid down his pencil, and, turning back, proceeded to read once more the words he had already considered with so much care and thought. This time he was, apparently, dissatisfied. He rose from his chair and going to a table picked up a fresh copy.

"Better keep myself in the background as much as possible," he murmured. "She'll see what I mean her to quickly enough without my marking the passages. I'll send the book to her simply as I have sent a score of others, without word or comment, merely as a mark of friendship and esteem. Yes, that will be best!" And wrapping up the volume neatly he wrote on the cover in a strong, clear hand:

TO MISS MARGARET GERARD

Then he addressed it and rang for his man, who appeared and vanished upon his errand.

Mr. Hardy threw himself back in his comfortable chair once more with evident enjoyment and repose.

He was decidedly a handsome man — well groomed, heavily built, with a broad, massive face and a fine mouth — albeit hard, even cruel — and faultless teeth.

He was esteemed an upright member of society — a little gay, perhaps, fond of wine and pleasure, as was natural in a man of his position, but on the other hand he was considered to possess the saving virtues of his class — honor, chivalry, and an abhorrence of all dark and treacherous transactions.

His serene expression and dignified attitude expressed immaculate virtue — cold, perhaps, and unsympathetic, but emphatically virtue of a lofty and blameless type.

And yet, if we take from his watch chain a tiny key, and with it unlock a drawer in the dark walnut desk in one corner, we will find hidden the original manuscript of that very book which has just excited London, and if we could read his thoughts we would find them entirely taken up by a monstrous design, for the accomplishment of which the manuscript in the secret drawer and the book now in every Londoner's hand were but steps of a series; and if we could look into the past we would read there the history of crimes equalling in atrocity those imaginary ones the record of which he has placed in this volume of counterfeit biography.

. . . . . .

Early on a summer's morning, some ten or fifteen years before this mysterious book was ever heard of, a boy and girl were busily at work in one corner of a garden, digging for worms, in the silence of perfect good fellowship. Presently, when their cans were filled, each shouldered a fishing rod and with easy, swinging steps, passed through a little opening in the garden wall out into a glistening world of velvet lawn beyond.

Such a quaint old garden; surrounded by a high brick wall, against which fruit trees are trained, while all round the place run trim little paths, bordered by rows of pansies and violets, and great squat rose bushes. Outside there is a charming scene of woods and lawn, with a lake shining in the distance,

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Such a quaint old garden; surrounded by a high brick wall, against which fruit trees are trained, while all round the place run trim little paths, bordered by rows of pansies and violets, and great squat rose bushes. Outside there is a charming scene of woods and lawn, with a lake shining in the distance,

and a fine old manor house in the background, rambling and picturesque.

By and by, up the path from the lake, marching in perfect time, come the boy and girl, each with a string of fish, and as they march they sing:

"Bring the comb and play upon it,
Marching here we come —
Margaret cocks her bright blue bonnet,
Peter beats the drum,"

and on they go round a corner of the house to the cook's room, where the fish are deposited, and their clothes cleaned and brushed.

Later in the day there is tennis or a ramble in the woods; pony rides, and, on rare occasions, excursions as far as Winchester, the Cathedral city, where, on one stormy afternoon, they had seen, just as the nursery rhyme had said,

"The organ with the organ man
A singing in the rain."

The summers passed and came again. Little Peter grew from a stout young lad into a strapping specimen of manhood, and Margaret, too, glided almost imperceptibly, from a long-legged, curly-headed state of tomboyishness, into as charming and beautiful a girl as one could hope to find. Yet, as these changes took place, no temporary estrangement came between the two old playmates. Their fellowship had always been of childlike simplicity — their love the unconscious growth of years.

But one autumn all this was changed. They were no longer children, and the long summer of constant companionship had opened their eyes to what before had never been dreamed of. So when Peter travelled back to Oxford for his last year there, he carried with him her promise to be his wife, her sweet fond words of love still ringing in his ears.

Somewhat later that same autumn a large party assembled at the squire's — Peter's father — for the shooting. Among the men from London was Stephen Hardy, an old friend of the squire, though in years considerably his junior. During this visit Mr. Hardy met the squire's ward, Margaret Gerard, for the first time, and was immensely taken by her. The girl's beauty at-

tracted him and her decidedly marked coldness towards himself amused rather than abashed him. He found pleasure in seeing her flush of anger as he showed her attention; and for this reason, if for no other, he managed to hang about her constantly, attending to her little wants, and smiling when her lips trembled and the hot blood rushed to her face.

But presently, when he learned from the squire that within the year this beautiful girl would come into possession in her own right of some fifty thousand pounds, his conduct underwent a violent change. Humble and respectful bearing, however, failed to remove the unfavorable impression he had already made, and, meeting with a contempt which Margaret now took little pains to conceal, he was compelled temporarily to give over his suit, and withdrew to London, cursing both the girl and his own folly. Before he left he learned from the squire of Peter's engagement.

Settled once more in London, Stephen Hardy began to lay his plans in earnest. His affairs were in a desperate condition. His fortune had been dissipated years before, and he had been forced to resort to every sort of makeshift to keep up appearances. Money had been obtained on personal security at usurious rates; he had eked out this income with cards and dice, and, once or twice, had taken part in very shady transactions. But now, he well knew, he had reached the end. Not only was he head over ears in debt, but in imminent danger of arrest by pressing creditors.

He speedily decided upon his course. The rebuffs he had received from Margaret Gerard, and his destitute circumstances with the necessity of their immediate improvement by some sudden coup, alike spurred him in the one direction. To subdue the proud girl, to marry her, to soothe his wounded pride and at the same stroke to obtain the means of freeing himself from an intolerable burden was a programme highly attractive, which he determined to follow at once.

The chief obstacle was Margaret's engagement to Peter. By cajolery and threats, and by broad hints of the brilliant prospects now opening before him, he managed to obtain from his creditors a further advance of five hundred pounds. With this he established himself handsomely in Oxford, in pleasant quarters near

Peter's college, and lay there like some animal of prey, waiting an opportunity to strike.

Meanwhile the unconscious Peter passed the days happily, playing cricket, boating, riding steeple-chases, and writing frequent letters to his sweetheart in the country. In one he spoke of having been surprised at meeting his father's friend Mr. Hardy, in Oxford. "He says," wrote Peter, "that he has run down to do some literary work at the Bodleian. Rum idea that, isn't it? However, he gives capital 'wines' and seems to have taken quite a fancy to me; but he's not exactly my sort, I think."

Several months passed. The money was rapidly dwindling, and Hardy grew desperate. He said to himself that he had been too squeamish. His mind, naturally bold and reckless, turned now to sweeping measures — the mere creation of a misunderstanding or estrangement between the two seemed to him no longer enough.

Mr. Hardy met Peter one morning on the "High" and in a natural manner arranged a meeting that evening at his own quarters. He then at once took a train for London, leaving on the table in his sitting room at Oxford cigars, glasses and a decanter of sherry. Peter came in the evening as had been arranged, and, not finding his host, lit a cigar to while away the waiting moments. Presently he poured out a glass of wine and picked up a book, and the minutes slipped by as Peter read and sipped the wine. Soon a drowsiness came over him — the book slipped from his fingers, his head sank down upon his chest, and he sprawled in a strange, unnatural way upon the chair.

While this was happening the eyes of Hardy watched his victim cautiously from an inner room. He had had a busy day in London. He had lunched with a party of friends at one of his clubs and eaten an early dinner at another; and during the afternoon had visited a matinée and placed himself conspicuously in the front of a box, in full view of thousands of eyes. In fact he managed, in a course of a few hours, to provide himself with a host of witnesses to his presence in London, and was heard to make an engagement for a late supper at the Criterion. He then went swiftly to Paddington station, slipping aside for a moment into a dark alley where he disguised himself with a heavy beard,

moustache and wig. He travelled to Oxford third class and reached his rooms safely some minutes before Peter arrived.

Old Tom was striking nine o'clock when at length the drug had taken its effect, and Hardy was able to step boldly out towards his unconscious guest. He made fast the door and window shades, stripped Peter of his clothes, and, with a brush and some acid, discolored his limbs with reddish brown spots, washed his face with a preparation that left it of a peculiar leathery, puckered appearance, shaved off the hair of his head and eyebrows, and then dressed him in the coarse garments of a laborer. Peter's own garments he made up into a separate bundle. These preparations had taken some time. Upon their completion his victim began to show feeble signs of life. Noting this, Hardy at once helped the poor boy to his feet, took the bundle of clothing under his arm, descended to the street and led the drugged youth slowly away. As they crossed the Thames Hardy flung the bundle of clothes into the river.

That night Peter was delivered into the hands of an attendant, and two days later, with thirty miserable, unclean beings, closely watched and guarded, set sail from Liverpool for Robben Island, near Cape Town, in Africa, one of the largest of the English leper hospitals.

A plan more effective could hardly have been conceived. The requisite certificate of medical examination had been forged and bore a name influential enough to allay any suspicion that might have been aroused in the minds of the representatives of the leper settlement by the manner of Peter's delivery. The removal of such unfortunates was necessarily as secret as possible. Peter's weakened condition, his leathery face and whitened hands, the complete lack of hair about his person all seemed to indicate unmistakably his dread disease. Surrounded by genuine lepers, Hardy had reasoned that, during the long voyage out, the disease must seize upon Peter in sober earnest, and that when he landed at Robben Island he would be indeed a hopeless leper.

That same night Hardy showed his smooth face at the Criterion in London at supper with his friend, and when he thought of the ample alibi he had prepared, he laughed aloud.

The storm that followed Peter's disappearance was long in sub-

siding. Nearly a year passed before the squire, a broken man, consented to return to his country home for a temporary rest. With him went Hardy, who had been at his side continuously throughout his investigations.

He, too, was greatly altered. In the serious, kindly attentive companion, it was difficult to recognize the reckless, pleasure-loving, selfish being who had formed one of the jovial company at the manor house the fall before. In his conduct towards Miss Gerard, particularly, his gentleness, his sympathy, and his forced cheerfulness were conspicuous and untiring.

And yet he was not long in discovering that he was now no nearer the goal than he was a year ago. With no evidence whatever of the lad's death, there survived a very natural hope in the minds of those who loved him that the boy might some day be restored to them. In Margaret Gerard, he saw with concern, this hope was more deeply rooted than in any of the others. She clearly would cling to it until the most unquestionable and convincing proof of the contrary was laid before her. He determined to *manufacture* such proof, and make it of such a character as to kill all respect for Peter's memory. No sentimental attachment for the dead must be permitted to stand in the way of her becoming his wife.

With the ingenuity and heartlessness peculiar to him he then wrote the book which became the talk of the town. He had a vast knowledge of crime, and the work was congenial, and well done. Throughout the volume, but more particularly in the preface, he inserted many trifling references to Peter's boyish days, which he had learned in talk with the old grooms and servants of the house, and which he knew would be convincing with Miss Gerard. Before he gave the volume to the world he contrived to have slurs cast upon the boy's fair name, so that the revelations in the book might not be so unexpected as to pass belief. His success in forging the doctor's certificate induced him to try again the same expedient, in a letter purporting to have been written by Peter himself on the eve of his death, asking his father's forgiveness for the shame and sorrow he had brought upon him, and explaining how he had fallen into bad ways at Oxford, had taken to gambling and drink and stooped to one base act after another,

until, out of fear of discovery and arrest, he had secretly fled abroad. Since then he had plunged into dissipation and crime, until now he had been brought to his death bed. During his illness, he added, he had written a little sketch of his life which would be published, in the hope that it might frighten other young men from the same mistakes into which he had himself fallen.

This letter Hardy mailed with his own hands in Paris. A month later his book was published.

In the interval he had managed to see the squire and after the severest cross-examination had, with feigned reluctance, acknowledged that Peter had from time to time borrowed large sums from him, and that during his brief stay in Oxford he had frequently seen the boy intoxicated and in disreputable company, and had heard that he was betting on the races and losing deeply.

The poor squire, as Hardy expected, sank completely under this last blow. He attempted no inquiries at Oxford, but sat alone in his library all day long, speaking to no one, mourning for his son.

Then Hardy sent the innocent-looking but diabolical book upon its dastardly mission.

When he went down to the squire's a month later he found a house so altered from the happy, sunny home he had seen on his first visit, that even he, for the moment, felt a tinge of shame. It passed at once, and he fell quite naturally into his old position of comforting friend. Sometimes he would coax the squire into a game of billiards or out for a ride; in the evening he would play cribbage with the squire's wife, or hold her yarn, talking the while about his travels and the strange things he had seen.

With Miss Gerard he had more difficulty. She was so much shut up in her room as to be almost inaccessible, and when present her listlessness and indifference made conversation almost impossible. One day he found her in the library, before the squire's disordered desk, reading Peter's last letter to his father, the one Hardy had mailed in Paris. He sat down in dismay, planning how to get Margaret away; it frightened him to see her looking at his forgery so intently. "Ah, Miss Gerard," he began in a low voice, that shook a little with emotion, "why dwell upon the past. The poor boy is dead and in a better world, let us hope. He died full of sorrow and repentance for whatever wrong he had done."

She looked up at him quickly for a moment, and then down again at the letter. Stretching out for something to play with in her nervousness, she picked up the first object her hand touched, which chanced to be a powerful magnifying glass that lay among the papers. For some moments she turned it about absent-mindedly.

Then she began, almost unconsciously, to look through it at different objects about the room, while Hardy sat in his chair, paralyzed with fear — one glance through the glass at the letter on the table might suffice to reveal his forgery. He could not move, nor speak; he merely watched, fascinated by every motion that she made.

The girl played awhile with her toy, and then slowly laid it upon her lap. Hardy breathed a sigh of relief.

"That looks like a very fine glass Miss Gerard," he said at last, but in a voice so unnatural as to bring her out of her revery at a jump. "May I look at it?"

"I hardly knew what it was I held," said Margaret carelessly. "Certainly you may see it. I believe my uncle values it very highly," and holding it up she looked through it for the moment full upon the letter.

She did not cry out, nor, indeed, show any feeling, but sat erect in her chair as if turned to stone and read the letter through very carefully twice. Then she left the room without a word.

An hour passed, and Hardy still sat in the library, waiting and planning. Finally he rose to leave. The door was locked. He tried two others, with the same result. Then he turned to the windows. The room was on the ground floor — he would escape that way — but on each side he saw that a man in the squire's livery was on watch. He threw himself once more into his chair.

Meanwhile Margaret had told her uncle of her suspicions, and he had examined the letter through the glass and pronounced it a forgery. A score of differences between this and Peter's true writing became apparent on minute examination.

For some moments the squire sat in his chair, stunned as Margaret had been. Then he leapt to his feet, his eyes flashing, his whole frame trembling with excitement. He called for a horse, ordering as he rode off that a watch be kept over Hardy

until his return. The station, a distance of three miles, was reached in twelve minutes, just in time to flag the down express.

With a detective Hardy's London apartments were entered, his belongings ransacked, and in his desk were found not only the manuscript of the supposititious memoirs, but proof of other irregularities, sufficient to justify his arrest, a warrant was obtained, and that same night the squire with two police constables returned to the "Park."

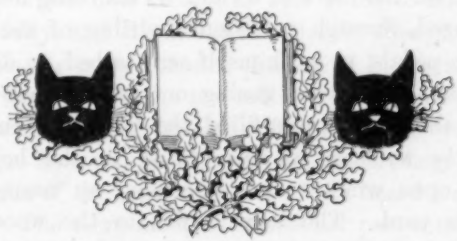
As they neared the house, the squire was puzzled by what he saw. The whole place was ablaze with light, and although it was after midnight, no one, apparently, had retired. The dogs had not been kennelled, and as the party approached still nearer, they came springing about the squire, barking and wagging their tails.

"Confound it! what has happened! James!" he shouted to one of the stable men, "what's wrong. Why aren't you in bed?"

"O Squire, haven't you heard of it! Young Master Peter's here. Yonder in the house; he came three hours ago."

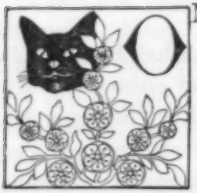
As he spoke a door opened and a tall, broad figure stood in the midst of a flood of light, calling out to know the meaning of all the uproar. It was Peter, safe and well.

At Robben Island his honest face and straightforward story had impressed the authorities, who gave him separate quarters. At the end of a few months the effects of Hardy's chemicals wore off, and Peter, healthy and strong as ever, was set at liberty, with money for his passage home.



The Bicycle That Ran Itself.*

BY FRANK W. SAGE.



NE o'clock — whew!"

Bart Meadows sat up in bed, stretching and yawning wearily. Four hours he had lain there, vainly trying to compose himself to sleep. The clock in the kitchen had just struck. The boy got up cautiously, fearful of waking his brother George, sleeping soundly beside him. George was a book-keeper in Salem, a city nineteen miles by turnpike from the Meadows place. He had ridden out to the old home that afternoon on a new chainless bicycle, and had retired exhausted by the unaccustomed exertion.

Now, Bart had for two years suffered with a low grade of bicycle fever. How had he not hungered, thirsted, agonized for a bicycle. Long had he worn bicycle shoes, bicycle caps, badges, a bicycle whistle to summon Nero, the dog, (Nero never responded to the call, however), and a bicycle "sweater," in lieu of an overcoat. By these tokens had he secretly hoped to move his brother George to buy him a wheel. But somehow the element of pathos in all this escaped George, who, besides being self-absorbed, was intolerant of meddlesome boys, such as Bart was. From the moment of his riding the new bicycle into the yard, he had been beset by Bart for the favor of a ride. This being denied the boy he had managed, through persistent twirling of the wheels and twiddling the pedals, to get himself sent to bed, in disgrace.

Wide awake, Bart stood gazing out of a window. The full moon, rising above the trees, filled the yard with mellow light. This presently wrought an inspiration in the boy; he crept through the open window and descended by means of a grape trellis to the yard. The bicycle was in the woodshed. Bart reached through a hole, unlatched the door, and brought it out.

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He had learned to ride on a schoolmate's iron-tired bike, altered from a three-wheeled velocipede, and so knew something of the poetry of bicycle motion.

"Blamed if it doesn't look as if it would almost run itself!" he exclaimed admiringly. He wheeled it the length of the grape arbor, bearing his weight upon it. "For a cent I'd mount it," he said, by way of preparing himself for any inspiration which the genius of the occasion might be holding in reserve. Presently he actually mounted, waiving the monetary consideration. He rode the length of the arbor.

"I'll bet you a dollar you can't ride to the milestone and back, Bart Meadows," he said. The stone was fifty yards beyond their gate. Bart bristled at the covert imputation of the challenge.

"I'll bet you forty dollars I can," he retorted stoutly, and off he started. Returning he allowed the bicycle to coast slowly past the gate. "Tell you what, it does run itself," he exclaimed, as the bicycle kept on down the pike. He hoisted his feet to the "coasters," and let the wheel run. "You're doing this, not me," he said, disallowing responsibility and disregarding grammar with equal impartiality. On, on, it ran, faster and faster, the grade favoring. Bart wished that he had taken time to don his clothes. But after all, what did it matter? The night was warm, the neighborhood secluded, and he enjoyed perfect freedom of movement in his night-shirt. Joy thrilled the boy's heart; long had he lingered in the ranks of the forlorn contingent patiently waiting for a chance to ride some other fellow's wheel. It was almost too good to believe that he was free to ride as far and as long as he pleased.

"I'd like to know how George is ever going to find it out," he laughed gleefully, and dismissed all further thought of George, and all concern for consequences, preserving in memory only one saying of his brother's at the tea table, to the effect that "everything is just around the corner, to a fellow on a bicycle." Skimming down into hollows, pedaling up the ascent beyond, Bart was wholly oblivious of the lapse of time, till he heard a church clock strike three. The next moment he flashed past a milestone, and caught the words, "Salem," and "Five Miles," at a glance.

"Jiminee, fourteen miles from home. I'd 'a' said about three.

Tell you what: I've got to get a move on me, homeward bound, if I don't want to furnish a show for the natives," said Bart. It so happened, however, that just here he came upon a wide level place, favorable for attempting some feats such as he had seen performed by a fancy trick-rider on the street in Salem.

"Let's see, first of all, if she really and truly will run herself," he said. He held it with the wheels in a line, gave it a firm, forcible push, and the bicycle, sure enough, ran several yards unsupported.

"I want to look sharp or it may get away and run off home without me," he cautioned himself. And on the third trial, as if it had been a sentient being, and had taken hint from his words, the bicycle got away from him, indeed, owing to his tripping on a stone as he ran beside it. Into a short lane it plunged, and through an open gate of a pasture. At the same instant the moon, for the first time that night, crept under a cloud.

Bart was on his feet and after the runaway in an instant. He was in time to make out faintly the form of the bicycle as it ran nearly straight down a hill; then it disappeared in the gloom. A sound followed as if it had plunged into water, and then all was still. In a frenzy of alarm Bart ran down the hillside, peering through the gloom, expecting to catch the gleam of water. But nothing of the kind could he discover. He sat down finally, waiting for the moon to reappear.

Here was a predicament indeed. Fourteen miles from home, clad in a night-shirt only, and daylight not an hour distant. Bart shut his eyes and tried to believe it was all a horrible nightmare, from which he would struggle awake presently, throbbing, perspiring, but immensely relieved. He recalled various instances in which he had dreamed of being in church, or at picnics, scantily clad, and tried now, as then, to pass over from the realm of morbid fancy into the field of actuality, refusing to believe that the conditions were reversed. Vain effort; the moon peeping out at him, directly, assured him of the reality of his surroundings, dimly outlined though they were. He started at finding himself sitting on the brink of a quarry, a dozen feet high. Eagerly Bart climbed down, confident that the stronger light would presently reveal a pool of water at his feet. But no water was there. Nor

was there water in the gully below the orchard. Stranger still, not in all the space of pasture and orchard, bounded by fences on four sides, was there a trace of the bicycle.

Bart's heart stopped beating. Over and over every inch of space he ran, again and again. Frantically he beat the bushes, none of them large enough to hide a cat. He was crying now, crazed with fear, ready to tear up the very sod in quest of the bicycle. Where, where could it be? Then the calm of desperation came over him; he sat down and composed himself to think, pressing his knuckles hard into his eyes. Was he insane? Had some one hypnotized him? He had heard his mother reading in a paper of a boy's wandering off in a hypnotic state, and of the strange things he did. Vivid as had appeared the midnight ride, he began to doubt its reality. The bicycle seemed to fade away from memory, as something unreal. He had only dreamed of George's bringing it home; his own ride was all a dream. Of course, he couldn't doubt that he was himself there, in a strange neighborhood, shivering in the damp air. That was real enough; he had simply wandered off in a somnambulistic dream fourteen miles. Fourteen miles? Wasn't that a long way for a boy to wander, and not feel tired out? No, it certainly was no dream.

But he must not waste precious time idly speculating; the moon's golden disc was gradually paling into silver, indicating the approach of morning. All the mystery and sentiment of night seemed to be vanishing.

Bart renewed the vain search; throughout the orchard and even on the slope of the hill beyond the gully. A clock somewhere struck four. The eastern sky was beginning to lighten. A farmer's wagon rattled afar up the pike. It came nearer and nearer. Bart saw faces gazing from under its white hood. Just beyond the orchard fence to his left, was a barn. The door stood open, offering refuge. Through it, panic-stricken, Bart fled, and up a ladder to a hay-mow. A mound of clover offered him shelter. Into its depths he burrowed, finding a grateful warmth, due to the fact that the clover was "sweating." Hardly had he snuggled into this warm nest, wondering what was to be the outcome of his adventure, than he became cognizant of a grim presence confronting him, fixing its eyes awfully upon him. In a softly

mocking tone a woman's voice inquired, "Slept well, I hope?" Bart sprang up. As he shook off the clinging clover, a sudden ludicrous change came over the woman's countenance. Miss Malinda Barrett, making her early morning rounds in quest of eggs, not unfrequently encountered tramps curiously ensconced in out-of-the-way nooks and corners. But a tramp in a night-shirt set at naught all her experiences and defied all familiar traditions touching the whimsicalities of these knights of the road. She recoiled slightly, astonished at the spectacle. Bart, recovering his wits, instantly shrank back into the depths of his burrow.

"What — what does this mean?" Miss Malinda gasped, for once having lost her presence of mind. The sudden recall to a consciousness of his plight overcame Bart's fortitude. He fell to crying piteously.

"I've — I've lost — lost my bicycle," he wailed. Miss Malinda stared.

"Lost your bicycle," she breathed. "I should say you had lost your wits. Where are your clothes?"

"At home," Bart snuffled, betraying no suspicion of its possibly being regarded as peculiar and exceptional that they were not somewhere nearer at hand.

"At home?" Miss Malinda echoed. "Why ain't you at home in them, then? What are you doing here, in this scandalous plight, boy?"

An adequate sense of the expediency of explaining his presence under these peculiar circumstances was beginning to dawn upon Bart. Falteringly, tearfully, he rehearsed the experiences of the night.

"I ain't no thief nor tramp. If you'll go away and give me a chance, I'll go out in your orchard and find that wheel," he suggested in conclusion. Miss Malinda eyed him penetratingly a moment, shaking her head. She stepped to a window of the loft, and called, "John, John, come here, I'm in the hay-loft." Before long a rubicund German man-of-all-work came slowly up the ladder. To him Miss Malinda briefly repeated Bart's story, with various significant winks.

"Now you go and take a look through the orchard for that bicycle, John," she finally admonished him. "Look sharp, I say."

In ten minutes John returned, reporting no discovery of a bicycle. Nor was Miss Malinda more successful, when, leaving Bart in John's charge, she herself went over the ground. She turned to Bart again.

"Boy, do you ever walk in your sleep?"

"No, ma'am," Bart answered, but with a self-conscious air of doubt so impressive that Miss Malinda was obviously at once assured that she had found the key to the mystery. Instantly her mind was made up.

"Here, John, you take charge of this poor boy. Carry him to the house and put him in the bed in the west room. We'll see what can be done about it after breakfast. I can't go traipsing among the neighbors for a suit of clothes for him, at this hour of the morning."

Accordingly John, good-humoredly obdurate to Bart's pleadings to be allowed to look for himself in the orchard, put him to bed, where he lay fuming, catching an occasional sentence of a monologue carried on by Miss Malinda in the kitchen adjoining.

"Never heard the name Meadows. Must have come a long ways, sure enough. Don't say but what it might have been fourteen miles. What of it? Sleep-walkers do most unheard-of things, that they couldn't do in their senses. I suppose he knows his own name, at any rate, unless perhaps he's crazy. Reckon we'll hear something by just waiting."

Bart's eyes blinked nervously.

"She can wait, if she wants to," he said to himself. "All the same, I'm going to skin out of this, somehow."

In fulfillment of that purpose he got up, having assured himself that he was not being watched, and stealthily crept to a door standing ajar. This ushered him into a room where two small girls were sleeping. Their clothes hung upon chairs. A sudden inspiration seized Bart. The desperate nature of the emergency nerved him; if he could once get out and lay his hands on that bicycle, he might yet reach home before George should awake. And here were clothes, lying on a chair, and there, on a hook, (blessed fortuity!) hung a sunbonnet — equal almost to a false face as a means of concealing a boy's personality. The larger girl's dress proved a tight squeeze for him, while the stockings

and shoes he found wholly out of the question. The bonnet's amplitude, however, afforded Bart a comfortable sense of privacy which contributed in some degree to a feeling of security. In his struggles with the bonnet strings, a button burst off the back of the dress, striking a wash-bowl with a sharp click, causing one sleeper to stir uneasily. Alarmed, Bart sprang instantly through an open window into the yard, finding a momentary hiding-place behind a row of currant bushes. Miss Malinda, peering intently in his direction from the kitchen window, changed the drift of her soliloquy just then.

"Laws-a-me, if them Dicksons ain't the oddest family, what with their painting and fixing up, the year round. Must have a new slate roof on their stable, and as if that wasn't enough they've actually put one on their corn-crib. Looking at it through them currant bushes I'd almost vow it was my gray sunbonnet hanging on a chair."

The providence which guards children and fools held the unconscious Bart immovable exactly two seconds longer than Miss Malinda's attention continued to dwell on the supposed new roof; then he crept cautiously on into the barnyard, and thence into the orchard. The orchard was hardly an acre in extent. Bart's eyes, sweeping the space at a glance, confirmed the evidence of his earlier search; no bicycle was there. But on the pike above, he found in the dust, plainly visible, the trail it had made when it escaped from him. He fancied he could discern faintly its course through the pasture to the brink of the quarry.

"It wasn't no dream. It sounded as if it splashed into water," he kept repeating, and strained his eyes toward the space below the bank as if to conjure up the pool, which some genie had maliciously caused to disappear. A large apple tree stood just where the pool should have been. Through its boughs, Bart's eyes caught the first rosy blush of the rising sun. As the blush changed to a golden glow, he became aware of faint scintillations changing presently to a dazzling gleam, from within the foliage of the tree. He shifted his position slightly to escape the annoyance; then a sudden ejaculation burst from him, and he tumbled headlong down the bank. In a moment he was up the tree and had his hands on the bicycle.

"You don't get away from me again very soon, Mister," he muttered, as he hastily lowered it to the ground. John, leading a horse into the barnyard a moment later, caught sight of a nondescript figure pedaling a bicycle with fierce energy up the lane. As he gazed wondering, Miss Malinda hailed him hysterically from the kitchen stoop: "Stop him, stop him, John, that boy, that boy there, there on the bicycle! He's stole my sunbonnet and little Mary's clothes, and goodness knows what not. Oh, you sneaking little thief, you."

An hour or two later, George Meadows, scouring the neighborhood of his home, was startled by the selfsame apparition driving post-haste up the pike. As it neared him, the figure dismounted, and an agitated face peered out of the depths of the calico sunbonnet.

"Were — were you — er looking for me, George?"

The voice was timid, deprecating. George had suddenly become petrified. He stooped and scrutinized the face under the bonnet's brim. "What in thunder — what does all this mean, you young rapscallion. Where have you been with my bicycle? This is a pretty row!"

Tearfully, penitently, Bart told his story, concluding with an optimistic outburst: "It's a good thing it happened though, don't you think so, George? It's taught us the new bicycle's very worst trick. Lucky it was me instead of you got fooled by it. Supposing it had been you that it played the trick on; how would you have looked, scooting along this turnpike in broad daylight, rigged up in gal's clothes?"

The Disposal of Miss Polly.*

BY JOHANNA DUNCAN.

THE King's Daughters met at Madge Braxton's that morning and she had to rap three times for order before she could be heard, for there had been a party in town the evening before and a new dressmaker had moved in, so that there were many things of interest to discuss during the meeting.

"Girls, you must listen if you want to hear," she said in a voice of thunder. "The question comes before this circle for the twenty-fifth time, 'What shall we do with Miss Polly?' For the benefit of our two new members I will state that we have cared for this person for three years. We have paid her room-rent, furnished her provisions, employed a small girl to wait upon her and given her comfortable clothes, and through it all she has never lifted her finger to help herself, but persists in being 'taken down' with divers imaginary diseases, so that we have to continue to care for her, and now we need the money and time for other and more deserving poor. What shall we do with her?"

"Lay the case before her and persuade her to go to work," suggested a new member.

This was greeted by a derisive laugh.

"My dear, she has always posed as an invalid and is 'taken down' immediately, whenever we tell her she is looking better. She has outlived all her family, who went to their graves slaving for her, and she was always too feeble to walk across the field to the graveyard to see them buried!"

"Why not send her to the almshouse?" was the next piece of advice.

"Ah, no, that would not do. We are a circle of mercy."

"Why not marry her off?" timidly piped Mary Whitby's voice from a far corner.

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There was a combined shriek in fourteen treble keys.

"Will Mary Whitby please keep to the business of the meeting and not jest," said the president sternly, waving the paper-cutter threateningly.

"I did not mean it as a jest," said Mary, rising to defend herself. "Why should Miss Polly not be married, if we can find the man?"

"Well, we will send you after him, then, but as we cannot afford to pay your expenses to the antipodes and cannot introduce you to all the inmates of all the asylums, it is not a feasible project!"

But Mary urged her point with ardor. To be sure, Miss Polly was on the gray side of forty, and it was true that she had false teeth, but those were not impediments to marriage. She really was not homely. If she curled her bangs and had a stylish gown she would look like every other woman. The very monotony of her existence had spared her from having wrinkles and her countenance was as serene as possible. Everything had always been done for her, except to marry her, and even that might now be accomplished, if the girls would pull together.

"'Pull together!'" cried the president, "We will make ropes of ourselves and drag him to the altar if we can ever find the sacrifice, for she has sapped the life out of our circle and we must dispose of her for the benefit of others."

Mary drew on her gloves and took up her muff. "If you will give me two weeks to think over this matter and will promise to stand by me if I'm dragged too far into the personality of the affair, I will undertake the mission."

There were plenty of promises to assist in the enterprise, but given in tones of discouragement, and as soon as the door closed upon Mary's retreating figure many glances were exchanged and then the secretary said with much concern, "Girls, I'm afraid Mary is losing her mind. You know it is hereditary."

The little missionary was speeding on her way to Martha Lamson's cottage, up the hill.

"Martha," she asked innocently, after some directions for sewing had been given, "where was it you saw that old friend of Miss Polly's?"

"It was up in the mountains, Miss, last summer, at Crag's Pass."

"Tell me about it again. I think it is very interesting for Miss Polly to have had a lover."

"Well, there is not much to tell. He lives on the side of the mountain by himself and seems to be comfortable, but the neighbors say he is queer. When he heard I lived here he asked me if I knew Miss Polly, and then, when I knew him better, he told me one night that she was the only woman he ever loved and that she had disappointed him."

"What did you say his name was?"

"Jim Piper; but please, Miss Mary, don't say I told you anything about it, for you know how folks talk and I would not like him to know I told it."

"Ah, no; I'll not say a word. What does he look like, Martha?"

"He is right well-favored, with a red beard and right smartly stout."

That night, when all was quiet in the house, Mary sat alone in her room. With a little guilty smile, she took from a dainty white box a valentine, one decorated with many layers of paper flowers, turtle doves and verses, all of the frailest texture, and beneath a cozy nest of pink and blue eggs she wrote the name "Polly" in a tremulous hand with a fine-nibbed pen.

"There!" she exclaimed, "this is not a forgery. My name is Polly and I have a right to send any man a valentine, by all the laws of the country — and if it fails I'll never confess on earth."

Slipping the tender missive back into the box she addressed it to

MR. JAMES PIPER,
CRAG'S PASS,
VIRGINIA.

Then she went to sleep, and dreamed she was arrested for misusing the mails.

She had always been attentive to Miss Polly, but after this, she haunted her, watching for some change in the placid face, and finally, at the end of ten days, she reaped her reward, for Miss

Polly had curled her hair. There could be no possible doubt about it. Had it not hung like wet shoestrings for three years? Now the nicest little waves clung about her ears and there was a soft light in her large brown eyes that Mary had never seen before.

"Do you think it would be proper," asked the invalid, "for me to receive a gentleman in my room? Mrs. Gibbs's parlor is so cold I am afraid it would bring on another spell of neuralgia if I sit in there."

Mary clutched at her heart to the detriment of the laces on her gown, and it was a moment before she could reply with equanimity.

"Invalids are always supposed to receive in their rooms, Miss Polly, and if you expect any one to come I think I can make things look better in here. I'll bring a screen from home and hide the bed. You must let me know when he is coming."

The brown eyes were cast demurely upon the bare floor.

"I look for him to-morrow, on the five o'clock train, and I reckon he will come up here before he drives out to his old home. He used to live here before the war, but he has not been back since, and he wrote me he wanted to see me on some business."

The news spread through the circle in an hour and each girl contributed something for Mr. Piper's entertainment.

When the train whistled the next afternoon Miss Polly looked around her little room and rubbed her eyes like one in a dream. Several prints hung on the walls, the tin safe in the corner was ornamented by a bowl of cut flowers, a large Japanese screen in black and gold, with fat looking birds on it flying upside down, hid the tired old bed with its blue cotton quilt, a cheerful fire blazed in the grate and a brass teakettle simmered before its warmth. The teapot was ready on the hob, and Miss Polly's little pine table was covered with a snowy cloth and laid for two, in dainty blue china.

The provisions were of an impromptu nature, having been contributed suddenly from several larders. There was a dish of cold turkey, chiefly wings and gizzards, intended for the breakfast hash at the Whitbys'; a plate of pickled eggs, filched from Mrs. Braxton's sideboard; a mince pie, left unguarded to cool, which was searched for but never found by the cook; and these, with a

saucer of preserves and a generous plate of bread, made the little table look very inviting.

Miss Polly's faded sofa was covered with a gay rug and there, among the cushions piled effectively behind her, she lounged in a red cashmere tea-gown of Madge Braxton's and folded her soft hands while Mary gave the finishing touches to the room.

"Now you must be sure to make him eat something" she said as she went out, "and be just as cheerful as you can to make him feel at home."

Never had her heart beat more wildly than when, peeping through the blinds with Madge, she saw Mr. Piper with his oil-cloth satchel come up the little street and turn the corner towards Miss Polly's home. He creaked uncomfortably in his Sunday shoes and his collar was causing him acute agony, but he walked with the determined air of a man who does not intend everybody to know that he hails from the mountains, and knocked at Mrs. Gibbs's door until the house shook.

She had been warned of his approach and admitted him with some degree of interest, which was also felt by the three children, who hung to her skirts and peeped at him through the holes in her apron.

Up the bare, narrow little stairs he thumped, and, leaving his bag on the landing, tapped lightly at Miss Polly's door.

A slow, uncertain footfall within and then the bolt turned and her soft thin hand was in his hard one.

It was a very embarrassing moment for both, for a silence of twenty years is not easily broken and they felt in a vague way that this was a crucial moment. He did not scrutinize her. He was indefinably conscious of the warmth and cheer and general comfort of it all; and Polly in a red gown was a delightful mystery, for he had always remembered her in the purple and black calico.

She was the first to speak, and as she was casting about in her perturbed mind for something to say, Mary's suggestion occurred to her.

"Before I let you talk at all," she said, "I'm going to make your tea, for I know you are hungry," and having once spoken it seemed easier for her to continue.

It had been many years since she had dispensed such hospitality, and it gave her a thrill of gratification to hand Mr. Piper his tea and make him take a second help of turkey. He said little and ate much, which she thought was what all men did.

When the little luncheon was over and the mince pie was a recollection only, her guest drew his chair closer to the fire, and took from his trousers pocket a plug of tobacco.

Miss Polly trembled for the Braxton kettle.

"Well, Polly," he said, giving his scraggy red beard a determined pull to settle matters, "you see I've kept my word. I told you I would never come back to you unless you sent for me."

The danger of the kettle was nothing to this agony. If she told him she had not sent he might go away without saying anything. She tried to speak, but something choked her, for down beneath that pain in her side, below the mustard plasters and flannels, in a benumbed spot she called her heart, Mr. Piper's name was inscribed, and in sheer desperation she covered her face with her hands and two tears trickled through the slender fingers.

He moved over and sat beside her.

"You needn't take on about it, Polly. I was glad enough to come, but I've been living by myself so many years I may seem very rough to anybody as gentle as you."

"Sometimes of a night," he continued, retrospectively, "when I sit by my fire with nobody to keep me company but just my little Cuffy dog, I get mighty lonesome, with the snow piled up outside and the wind whistling, and inside nobody but just Cuffy and me — Cuffy and me."

Miss Polly sighed too.

"So you see I need a companion, Polly, and I want you to go back with me Thursday; but you're fixed so fine here maybe you will not be willing to give it up for me."

He looked at the black and gold screen and at the flowers on the tin safe and thought of the mince pie.

Then she told him about the King's Daughters, and how dependent she was, and that she did not have a cent in the world, and, strange to say, he seemed to like it.

When the news spread that she was to be married at the

Whitbys' early Thursday morning, intense excitement prevailed and presents poured in. Madge Braxton divided her wardrobe, the rugs, the screen, the cushions were all for the bride, and when they reached the station and all the luggage was thrown from the cart, nothing had been forgotten except the medicine bottles on the closet shelf.

As the train pulled into the station Miss Polly whispered to Mary:

"What was it you wrote him? I know you did it!"

"I only sent him a valentine with 'Polly' on it" confessed the criminal. "Are you going to tell him I did it?"

The bride smiled through her tears and then, with the wisdom born of forty lonely years and a woman's intuitive faculty for management, replied:

"No; I will not tell him yet, but he might throw it at me sometime, and then I'll tell him I'd have died sooner than ask him to come."

The White Jack Rabbit.*

BY A. W. WHITEHOUSE.

JOHN HARDWICKE is the hard-featured, hard-riding son of a Yorkshire parson, and is ranching it on the Laramie plains. Like most Yorkshiremen, he lives when he gallops and merely exists in the intervals, and till very recently he was the happy harborer of the most glorious excuse for a desperate ride that ever mortal man possessed.

He discovered his guest one early morning in June, 1896. Though not prepared for a day's coursing, he was taking a couple of greyhounds along from force of habit, and riding down his lower meadow he saw on some rising ground what appeared to be a patch of belated snow. As he drew nearer the white patch moved, and disclosed itself as a very large Jack Rabbit, showing brilliantly distinct against the bright green grass around it. Decent Jack Rabbits at this time of year wore a sober livery of brown, and when not on the move haunted the sagebrush and rocky hills, thus escaping observation. This fellow evidently courted destruction — he should find it.

So John Hardwicke cheered on the hounds, took his wiry little half-bred firmly by the head, and sat down in his saddle for the chase. The hounds were speedy as well as stout. They pushed the White Jack from the start, and after a few turns he set his face in a southerly direction, evidently bound for some well-known haven. With the hounds a few yards behind the rabbit, John Hardwicke rode the line, and it took him over nearly all the fences on the ranch.

At last, coming down a steep and rocky hill, John had to take his eyes off the chase for a moment to pick his ground. When he looked up the hounds had lost the Jack and were sniffing aimlessly about in a small circle of stones. There were several such

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circles in the little valley, marking the site of an old Indian encampment, having been used to keep down the edges of the tents.

"Nearly a four-mile point," mused John, "and a splendid rabbit; we will give him a few days' rest to recover from his stiffness and then go at him again."

But for several weeks he scoured the ranch for the White Jack in vain; and it was not till he had concluded that the rabbit had died from his exertions in the last run, that he saw the snowy patch in the selfsame spot in the lower meadow. The rabbit took the same course as before, and the hounds lost him again in the ring of stones. The chase was repeated at intervals of several weeks during the summer and fall, the Jack running close before the hounds and escaping unharmed every time. After the other rabbits began to turn white in the autumn he disappeared, or at any rate changed his quarters and his habits.

Now, though John Hardwicke's ledger was a labyrinth, and his day-book a nightmare, yet his Kennel Register was a marvel of accuracy and neatness, and his Sporting Diary afforded him better reading than anything in print. Gloating over its pages during the blizzard of March, 1897, when even he found it impossible to go out and kill something, he made the curious discovery that the five occasions on which he had hunted the White Jack had all been on the day before full moon.

This rabbit was certainly a curious customer, and it looked as if he might be relied on not only to furnish sport whenever found, but to notify his arrival in advance. John Hardwicke accordingly made his calculations, and invited a party for a certain day in June, 1897, to open the White Jack season.

Five of us turned up, English and American, well mounted all; and as we assembled in the yard, Hardwicke rode among us and made a little speech.

"Gentlemen," he said, "to-day we are going to try to kill the White Jack. With other rabbits I always think it murder to slip more than two hounds, but out of compliment to our friend's stoutness I am going to give him the benefit of all my six. Apart from that, we must treat him fairly. Give plenty of room if the hounds turn him, and above all don't ride over him. If he once

sets his head for his point, I promise you the gallop of your life, and as I have been unable to find how he gets away, I will ask you all to keep your eyes on him throughout the run; one of us must surely be able to see him as he dives into his hole."

We started, and the White Jack was in his usual place. When it had been a question of two hounds he had indulged in some clever turning before breaking away to the south. This time he waited till the hounds were nearly on him; then with a great leap he was off on his accustomed course.

Do not suppose that coursing a straight-running rabbit is an ordinary undertaking like fox hunting; the pace is desperate, and if you take your eyes off the chase you are likely to lose it. It is more like steeple-chasing blindfold over an unknown country, and the only breakneck job I know that beats it is following a couple of peregrine falcons down wind after a crow, with your eyes in the clouds and a cramped little English country of ten-acre fields spread out before you.

We thunder along, fifty yards in the wake of the hounds, Hardwicke a little nearer and yelling them on. The going is splendid on the level meadow. Soon there looms up a stout buck fence, under which the rabbit dives. Old Myrtle, schooled to English hedges, flies it; the other hounds go under or through almost as quickly and with less loss of wind. Now comes our turn. Hardwicke hops over like a bird. The Philadelphia Shepherd on his tall thoroughbred raps it hard and blunders on landing — the great horse is hardly in his stride as yet. The rest of us take it with fair success. A spin across the meadow land, and now another cross-fence. We all clear it and still race over the springy turf.

Next the White Jack turns sharply to the left, and with a great leap clears the creek, and we harden our hearts to follow. It is twelve feet broad, six feet deep and brimming full. Alas for the broncho blood in my mount; he prefers an in and out to flying. I get a ducking, lose time in scrambling out on the other side, and for the present bring up the tail end. Then comes the lane, a high bank and leaning fence toward you. It is nothing for John Hardwicke, he has done it many times before; but how about the rest of us? The Laramie Liveryman crashes into the

rails, blunders in the lane, and rolls over, his horse completely blown; the Philadelphia Shepherd flies it with an enormous bound, drops over the low leaning fence on the other side of the lane, and wallows in three feet of liquid mud. And who shall clean the fair white buckskins?

The rest of us scramble through the Liveryman's gap, and flounder out of the mud on the other side, and now we are away again on firmer ground. The White Jack just leads the hounds, but is going easy. A slight rise, a scramble up a ten-foot bank, and a standing leap over the great irrigating ditch above it. One more fence and we leave the meadow land, but that fence is an evil-looking one — four feet of post and rails, to be taken up a steep incline. The Rock Creek Hermit charges it first. His horse refuses. But Hardwicke rides at it very slowly, and actually lifts his wonderful little weed clear over. Two rush at it together and break it all to pieces and the rest of us follow through the gap.

Now we have left the meadow, and risen to rolling pasture, and a lucky turn brings us nearer to the hounds. Still the White Jack does not increase his lead, but he goes easier than ever. "Look out, Shepherd, the holes are very thick." He has found one — his horse is on his nose — will he fall? No, he struggles and is going again. Down a gentle slope now, to the upper meadow, and we must put on steam (if we can) for the chase is drawing away. A low buck fence and a sticky creek, and there are only three of us left. The others are blown, pounding along behind at a miserable canter.

Here the White Jack inclines to the left, while John Hardwicke for the first time leaves the line. He must know something, and I will follow him. Not so the Philadelphia Shepherd — he follows the hounds and comes to grief, for he has chanced upon a fearful piece of ground — white, sticky gumbo hummocks, high and close together. His great striding horse blunders and sticks, picks himself up, blunders again and rolls over. Good-by, Shepherd.

We follow parallel and to the right of the line on nice level going till the line comes back to us. Now comes the creek again, small and easy; next a low fence; but it must be jumped with plenty to spare, for below the top rail are three barbed wires. We

take it at a trot; then off and away. Now ride your horse for all that is in him, for we are near the end; a long gentle rise up a rock-strewn slope, and the hounds are not three feet behind the Jack. Hardwicke shouts back to me "Pull up and watch him when you get to the top of the slope," and disappears over the brink. I pull up gladly. There are the teepee rings in the little valley, and the hounds are at the White Jack's tail. He puts out his best speed, reaches the centre of the middle ring, and is gone. But we find no hole near, nor vestige of any hiding-place.

And so it came about that we formed the White Jack Club. Many other days did we enjoy coursing the ordinary rabbit of the plains — many a gallop, many a tumble — but on the day before the new moon neither lawsuits, nor round-up, nor haying could keep us away from the Hardwicke ranch, and ever the White Jack carried us over the well-known course and vanished at the teepee ring.

It was towards the end of May, 1898, that the Government began moving Indians to the Omaha Exposition. One bright spring day when the White Jack Club had assembled at Hardwicke's ranch, the chore-boy, who had been sent to the neighboring railway station for the mail, came back with the news that the east-bound passenger was tied up there because of the burning out of a big bridge, and that there was a carload of Indians on the train. The Club had a recruit in the shape of the Cedarhurst Smasher, who appeared to be full brother in blood to most of the Vanderbilts and all the Astors, and who was knocking about Laramie for the fun of the thing. He was a determined horseman with some judgment, but had a wonderful fund of information, all of it incorrect. When the conversation turned on Indians, he began to talk of their wonderful riding, a delusion as to which I believe still lingers in the East.

"No Indian ever took a fence in his life," said Hardwicke.

"I'll make a bet about that," said the Smasher, "and if we can borrow some Indians from the train we'll settle it at once. Fifty dollars that if I am allowed to pick six Indians and mount them on jumpers, at least one will ride any coursing line we may chance to get to-day."

Hardwicke had turned to the back window and was scanning the meadow with his binoculars.

"Done," he said, and motioning to me, handed me the glasses.

"I don't understand it, but what do you see?"

"The White Jack," said I. It was three weeks before his time.

"Helps the bet," he said.

The Club immediately adjourned to the railway station, and learning that the Indians were Shoshones, proceeded to look up the man in charge. This proved to be Lee Jackson, who had punched cows for both Hardwicke and the Hermit, now a corporal of Rough Riders. It appeared that when the regulars from Fort Washakie had been sent to the front, the authorities had detailed Rough Riders in their places, and now Lee with three troopers was in temporary charge of the consignment. There should have been an agent or some large-sized official on the train, but he had apparently lost himself at Laramie. Lee proved quite ready to loan a few bucks, and volunteered to come along.

"They have been acting rather queer and restless this morning," he said, "and I guess a gallop ought to settle their nerves a bit. I can't talk their language, but Black Bear here understands English, though he doesn't say much."

He certainly did not, being a forbidding-looking rascal who conversed chiefly in grunts. However, he soon had a round half dozen of them selected who were ready, we gathered, to charge barns and leap estuaries in pursuit of a little loose silver.

The Indians then scrambled back into their car, and we were afraid that they were becoming alarmed at the nature of their contract; but looking in we saw that they were going through a ceremony which consisted in crowning Black Bear with a bonnet made up of the grinning head of the beast whose name he bore. They soon came out, apparently eager for the ride.

On arriving at the ranch Hardwicke took great pains to assign them all reliable leapers. Then came the question of saddles. The only two available cowboy rigs were given to Black Bear and another; one climbed gingerly into a seat of English make, while three preferred to chance it bareback.

There was a good deal of excitement among the members of the Club when John Hardwicke announced that the White Jack was at his old stand, and I think the Smasher wished his bet was off.

We took the full pack of greyhounds and rode down the meadow. The great White Jack sat up on his haunches and looked at us. Then began a strange performance on the part of the Indians. They formed in a circle around their chief and appeared to worship him. Slowly they chanted an unholy song, hoarse and squeaky, with a reminiscence of "yick, yack, yow" and the bagpipes and the clan McTavish.

Lee Jackson seemed uneasy, and told us that they had been singing that song at the reservation, and that the agent did not like it, connecting it with a new prophet who was stirring up trouble, and that the meaning was

"None but Black Bear
Can catch the White Hare."

The uncanny ceremony wound up with a whoop that startled the great Jack, and sent him on his journey with his ears laid back. It was a wild, strange ride, a gallop after the unknown. Certainly the five Indians justified Hardwicke, and ran a careful line of gates and gaps, but Black Bear was leading all the time. Whether we jumped fences I knew not; how we covered the ground we did not care; it was flying, rushing, an unknown, a new sensation; and ever at the tail of the hounds Black Bear was foremost, and his good horse never faltered.

Past the last fence and up the rocky slope we sped, and never a thought to the ground nor a consciousness of our horses; only to follow and see the end of the White Jack and Black Bear. For it was in our spirits that this was no common ride.

At the top of the slope Black Bear was among the hounds. Down the rocky hill he passed quickly through them. He reached the bottom and leaned far down over the right side of the saddle. On he galloped, his long arm sweeping the ground. The rabbit fled a yard ahead. The horse flew faster, and Black Bear seized the White Jack at the very edge of the mystic teepee ring. One moment he held him aloft in triumph, then thrust him, alive but passive, into the breast of his buckskin shirt.

Then there joined our group, from what direction we knew not, one we had not seen before — a White Squaw, or, let us say, an Indian maiden passing fair, riding bareback on a milk-white horse;

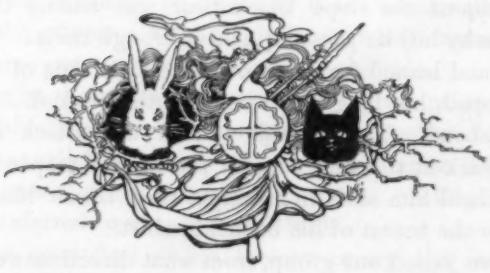
and on her head, even as on Baby Bunting's, was a bonnet made from the head of a great White Jack.

Side by side she rode with Black Bear amid a great silence; side by side she went with him to the train. Whether she travelled to Omaha with the other Indians I do not know; but we certainly never found the milk-white horse.

There are occurrences too fresh in history to need much reference here; and it seems foolish and superstitious to suppose that the White Rabbit has really exerted his or her influence on events. But the almost undoubted presence of the White Squaw at the Transmississippi, and the ugly temper of the Shoshones resulting in their early return to the reservation as a measure of public safety, need some explanation. And when we think of the subsequent outbreak, and of the White Squaw's brilliant leadership on her milk-white horse in the last desperate drawn battle with the troops, we of the White Jack Club sometimes believe that it was she whom we chased so often and so fruitlessly; and now that the regulars have lost the Indians in the ravines of the Grand Teton, we are tempted to hope that she has led them direct to the Happy Hunting Grounds, whence there is no returning, and where Bears and Rabbits are at rest.

But one thing we are quite sure of.

And that is that the Smasher won his bet.



"I said Ayer's not yours"

I know what I want. I've used Ayer's Family Medicines in my family for fifty years. I know all about them. I don't know anything about yours.

When I ask for "Ayer's," I want Ayer's. Don't tell me anything else is "just as good." It isn't, and I know it. "Ayer's" is the best, and "Ayer's" is the kind I want.

Why, I remember hearing mother say, over sixty years ago, that she couldn't live without Ayer's Pills. And when I remember how dark and rich her hair was at seventy, I believe she used Ayer's Hair Vigor, too.

Do you suppose I'd use any other Sarsaparilla but "Ayer's?" I take it every spring and fall, and I depend upon it. It braces me up,—makes me feel good all over.

And we're never without Ayer's Cherry Pectoral in the house. My grandmother gave it to me and I give it to my own grandchildren.

Just give me my bottle of "Ayer's," or I'll have to go to the next store. I know what I want. I want the best, the old, reliable, and that's "Ayer's."